

The Circuit Writer



NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY
Northern New Jersey Conference, The United Methodist Church

Fall 1976 - Number 8

ABOUT NEW JERSEY METHODISM:

"THE SPIRIT OF CAPE MAY"

by

Kenneth E. Rowe
Drew University

Excerpts from an address delivered at the Centennial Celebration of the Cape May Conference on American Methodist Union, September 12, 1976, in Cape May, New Jersey.

People throughout human history have marked with stones those special places where holy revelations have happened and historic events have occurred--stones to keep the memory and refresh the hope--the stones of Stonehenge and of Chartres, of Jacob's pillow and of Wesley's Chapel. In our nomadic culture we carry portable roots as we journey and live in tents tentatively. Stones on holy ground remind us of the significance of place. We need a few fixed places, like stars in the firmament, on which we can count, and to which we can, in all our wandering and wondering, return. Rene Dubos writes that when the words "genius" or "spirit" are used to denote the distinctive characteristics of a given region, city, institution or place, there is implied "the tacit acknowledgment that each place possesses a set of attributes that determines the uniqueness of its landscape and its people." The unique genius or spirit of Cape May for United Methodists is that here we first began to learn what UNITED means. How appropriate, then, that on this 100th anniversary of the Cape May Conference we dedicate a monument in stone to proclaim to this generation and to succeeding generations that this is a very special place for American Methodists!

It was in Cape May 100 years ago that the first diffident steps in the Methodist minuet of union were taken, when commissioners from the northern and southern Methodist churches met for the first time in thirty years. Sixty more years would pass before American Methodist's first major reunion actually took place (1939). We United Methodists who live 100 years later may wonder why the divorce happened in the first place and why the re-marriage was so long in coming. Let me try to tell the story.

Thirty years before the Cape May meeting--1844 to be exact--American Methodism divided North and South over the twin issues of slavery and the status of the Episcopacy. Methodism's own civil war began two decades before the national one. Almost from the beginning tempers ran high on both sides. Bitter controversy sprang up on the Mason-Dixon line and beyond and a lawsuit about the assets of the church publishing house was moving into the federal courts. The northern General Conference in the Spring of 1848 was in a vindictive mood. The delegates rebuffed an emissary from the South, repudiated the plan of Separation of 1844, and refused to recognize the corporate existence of the Church South. The decision of the Supreme Court ten years later forcing the Church North to give to the Southern branch its share of the assets of the Publishing House as agreed in the Plan of Separation, did not

ABOUT NEW JERSEY METHODISM - continued

lessen the hostility between the two churches. Tensions only increased as the bitter ecclesiastical battle of the 1850's became a bloody military one in the 1860's. So the two churches went their separate ways for 30 years.

In the waning days of the Civil War the editor of the CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE (New York) queried: "What are to be our ecclesiastical relations to the Methodism of the seceded states?" Many northern Methodists agreed with one of the preachers that the southern church "had been so completely in league with detestable sin (slavery) that the apostate church should be exterminated." This program of wiping out Southern Methodism, although its strongest endorsement came from New England Methodists, received classic formulation in the prose of The Rev. Daniel Curry of the CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE (N.Y.), the leading weekly paper of the northern church.

A policy of earnest and antagonistic aggression must...be adopted and put into action (he wrote). With this we may...certainly disintegrate the rival body, and absorb whatever of it shall be found worth preserving. (April 25, 1867)

But Curry and his crowd did not speak for all northern Methodists after the war. Another crowd and another paper suggested another approach to their Methodist brothers and sisters in the South. The spokesman for this party was the Rev. George Richard Crooks, later professor of church history at Drew. In the middle 1860's Crooks was in New York editing an independent Methodist newspaper called simply THE METHODIST. Together with an unusually able editorial staff including John McClintock (1st President of Drew), Bernard H. Nadal (another Drew Professor) and historian Abel Stevens, Crooks stumped for "a formal and generation restoration of the unity of American Methodism." Bishop Edmund Janes of the New Jersey area and Bishop Matthew Simpson of the Philadelphia area aligned themselves with the reunionist party. So did prominent laymen like Union General turned railroad magnate Clinton B. Fisk. Their plan of reunion did not merely envision the acceptance of individual Southern Methodists; it envisioned nothing short of a mutual annulment of the 1844 divorce. And they encouraged other Bishops and editors, clergy and layfolk to move in this direction.

While the two ideas on policy toward the south--the divide and conquer plan and the reunion idea plan--jostled each other in quest of official approval, the Church South slowly gathered strength following the devastating war. Competition for buildings and members intensified along the border states and well into the heartland of the South, for Northern Methodist preachers followed Northern troops deep into the South and claimed all Methodist church property for the northern church.

In view of the bitter reaction of the Church South to the program of the Northern Church in their midst, it seems incredible that any responsible leaders of either side should have anticipated union. Yet with all these events fresh in their minds and barely four years after the Civil War ended, the northern church took the initiative and offered the first olive branch to the south in the Spring of 1869. Bishops Janes and Simpson, messengers appointed by their fellow bishops, called on the southern bishops and talked openly about reunion. But the southern church and bishops were not ready for union; mutual recognition and fraternal relations was their immediate goal. In place of impulsive insistence on organic union, northern moderates like Crooks and company resolved to seek the affection of the church south on the latter's terms.

Before the beginning of "fraternity" between the estranged churches lay prolonged and complex negotiations. General Fisk opened his home in St. Louis and later his

Jersey shore home at Seabright to strategy sessions. A flurry of letters criss-crossed the Mason-Dixon line. Prominent pulpit exchanges were arranged deep within each other's territory. Even a series of joint camp meetings were arranged.

Formal negotiations on the new basis began when the northern General Conference in 1872 authorized three emissaries to visit its southern counterpart. Two years later the messengers were received cordially. The northern delegates intimated that an appointment of a commission by the Church South to parley over grievances would meet a like response from the 1876 General Conference of the church north. The southerners, with appropriate hesitancy, acted upon this intelligence, established a commission and dispatched delegates to the next General conference of the church north to inform them that the church south was ready for a settlement of differences. The northerners warmly received the distinguished representatives from the south and reciprocated by appointing commissioners to work toward a mutual recognition of each others ministry, membership and property. Correspondence between the chairmen of the two delegations fixed a meeting for the middle of August that year at Cape May, N.J. Here the joint commission was to seek the removal of "all obstacles to formal fraternity between the two churches."

Three clergymen and two laymen from each church gathered in historic Congress Hall in Cape May on the morning of August 17, 1876. Both sides knew well the obstacles to formal fraternity were principally two--the failure of the Northerners to recognize the Church South and the attendant property contests arising from the presence of two white Methodisms in the south. By the evening of the first day the commissioners from the North met the southern insistence more than half way and worked out and adopted the following formula: "Each of said churches is a legitimate branch of Episcopal Methodism in the U.S., having a common origin in the Methodist Episcopal Church organized in 1784." After the key demand of the Church South had been granted, the commissioners turned to a consideration of the property in dispute. With the points at issue resolved the joint commission then prepared a lengthy "Address to the Bishops, Ministers and Members of the M.E. Church and the M.E. Church South," the full text of which appeared in the next day's NEW YORK TIMES (August 24, 1876) and in the church press in the next weekly edition. Before parting the commissioners rose, offered prayers of thanksgiving, joined hands and sang "Blest Be the Tie that Binds". The "Thirty Years War" between Methodists North and South was over; reunion, however, was still three quarters of a century away! Although the road between Cape May in 1876 and Kansas City in 1939 was long and rocky, the Spirit of Cape May, together with the Holy Spirit, triumphed in the end.

100 years after the Cape May Conference we United Methodists still find ourselves struggling to understand what it means to be a united and uniting church. Ecumenical yearnings toward unity are matched by internal yearnings toward schism. Inside the church we live in a state of creative tension, an ambiguous but necessary detente between factions which are all too visible and vocal in a General Conference year. Keeping a pluralistic church from being rent asunder is an urgent priority for us all in the middle 1970's. The way to keeping everything that's nailed down from coming loose, I think, is to follow the example of our fathers in the faith who at Cape May after 30 years decided to bury the hatchet and go to the conference table. Let consultation rather than confrontation be our strategy as it was theirs. For only then will there be time for hearts to be changed, time for minds to be educated, above all, time for the Holy Spirit to move through the church.

Pluralism is not an option to consider; it is a reality to accept--and celebrate. In the last analysis a pluralistic church is held together only by the conviction that all of us are "one in Christ". Let that fragile vision of unrealized unity in Christ be ever before us as we chart our way through the 1970's and beyond. Long live the Spirit of Cape May!

LOCAL CHURCH RECORDS PROJECT

In order to encourage the gathering and preservation of local church records the Conference Commission is launching a microfilming project for local churches. Expenses would be shared equally between the local church and the Conference Commission. Microfilming would be done at cost by Drew University Library.

Each local church is encouraged to form a Records and History Committee and to begin to gather together from attics and basements, closets and trunks, all available official records (membership, baptisms, marriages, burials, etc.) along with minutes of the most important boards and committees (Administrative Boards, Trustees, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, Youth Fellowships and their predecessor groups).

A master microfilm file would be maintained in the Conference Archives at Drew. Physical copies may be returned to the local church or be placed on deposit with the Conference Archives as desired. Contact President Paul Spiecker for details.

LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY CONTEST - Awards to be presented during 1977 Conference

Five local churches--Frenchtown, Kenilworth, Port Morris, Stockholm and West Portal--have submitted histories of their churches published during the calendar year 1976 for our fourth annual LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY RECOGNITION CONTEST. Two awards will be presented during the 1977 meeting of the Conference in June.

If your church has published a history of your local church in 1976, we urge you to enter it in this year's contest now. Large or small, pamphlet or hard-bound, mimeographed or printed, all histories produced during 1976 are eligible. Each history will become part of the Conference's permanent collection. MAIL ONE COPY TO: Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, New Jersey 07940 by February 1, 1977.

BICENTENNIAL INVENTORY

'76 Associates of New York City is compiling data on religious growth and development of our country as a Bicentennial project aimed at eventually producing documentary evidence of our great religious heritage and continued vitality through our 200 years as a nation. Their research is being conducted for the Park Publishing Co. of New York City.

We believe their work is worthwhile and would like to help in their endeavor. Please be kind enough to enter the information on the enclosed card--most especially the founding date or year of your local church--and mail the card directly to them for compilation.

METHODIST HISTORY MAGAZINE -- A SPECIAL OFFER!!!

Methodist history buffs: - here's your chance to receive a first-class publication at half price! For a limited time only your Conference Commission on Archives and History is offering a special half-price subscription to METHODIST HISTORY, the quarterly publication of the national commission. A two year's subscription (8 issues) is now available for only four dollars. Please send your check for \$4.00 directly to the Commission Secretary: The Rev. Robert O. Bryant

307 Tontine Avenue
Lyndhurst, N. J. 07071

Deadline: December 5, 1976

TRAVELING EXHIBIT ON BISHOP FRANCIS ASBURY

A small exhibit of Asbury memorabilia from the collection of Drew University is available on request for use at special celebrations in local churches. The exhibit includes several mounted prints and photographs, a set of ordination certificates signed by our first Bishop, along with a pair of spectacles he wore. When used with historical items from a local congregation, this makes an attractive addition to an anniversary or other historical observation. Contact Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, N.J. 07940, 377-3000, Ext. 243.

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE

- ALLENDALE Dr. Kenneth Rowe of Drew University addressed the annual dinner meeting of the Church Society on the theme: "Bicentennial Reflections on the Methodist Tradition."
- LIVINGSTON The fall season of the United Methodist Women was opened with a special lecture and exhibit on "Piety and Patriotism during the American Revolution" by Dr. Rowe of Drew University.
- LOWER BERKSHIRE VALLEY The Lower Berkshire Valley church observed Bicentennial Sunday June 27, beginning with an early American-style worship service that featured Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."
- MILFORD The 150th anniversary of Milford Church was celebrated October 10, 1976, with District Superintendent Hunt preaching at the morning service and Professor Rowe from Drew University preaching an afternoon homecoming service.
- MT. TABOR Dr. Rowe of Drew University addressed a special dinner meeting of the United Methodist Women on "Methodism and the American Revolution."
- RIDGEWOOD The concluding event in the Bicentennial Concert series of the Ridgewood Church was a performance of the Youth Singer Tour Choir of First Church, Colorado Springs.
- ROSELLE PARK The Community United Methodist Church here helped the town celebrate its 75th anniversary and the 200th anniversary of the nation by contributing a float for the town parade on Saturday, June 12th. The float featured a replica of the original church building in which the Roselle Park Methodists first worshipped in 1873.
- STOCKHOLM This historic church has been officially placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The church traces its origin to the spring of 1800 when the Bethel Methodist Episcopal Society of Snufftown was formed. Land was purchased on May 26, 1826 and the sanctuary erected that same year. In 1975, the church received recognition as an official historic site within the state of New Jersey. Special services were held in May including a sermon by Dr. Clark W. Hunt, an address by Professor Henry Lambdin, and the dedication of a historic plaque.
- WYCKOFF Grace church held a "Spirit of '76 Bicentennial Camp Meeting" five evenings from Wednesday June 30 through Sunday July 4. The camp meetings featured special musical programs, films and three bishops (Ault, Taylor and Wicke) as guest speakers.

OTHERS?

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE is a regular column in our newsletter. If your church is planning a bicentennial or other anniversary celebration or preparing a history, please contact the editor and give us your story!

ORDER NEW RESOURCES !

from your
Conference Commission on Archives
and History

	Price including postage	Number ordered
GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL CHURCH HISTORIANS AND RECORDS AND HISTORY COMMITTEES, compiled by Dr. Walter N. Vernon. A new 40-page manual for local churches. Indispensable!	\$.75	_____
SERVICES AND RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP ON HISTORIC OCCASIONS compiled by Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe. Important for planning bicentennial services.	\$ 1.00	_____
A SHORT HISTORY OF THE METHODISTS, by Jesse Lee. Facsimile reprint of the 1st edition of the 1st history of Methodism in America originally published in Baltimore in 1810.	\$ 6.95	_____
BRONZE GRAVE MARKERS FOR UNITED METHODIST MINISTERS A limited supply of official markers for graves of pastors are available. The bronze markers, which contain a raised figure of a mounted circuit rider and the inscription, United Methodist Minister, may be bolted to the head stone or may be implanted in the ground.	\$ 16.00	_____
HOW TO WRITE AND PUBLISH THE HISTORY OF A UNITED METHODIST CHURCH by Wallace Guy Smeltzer A helpful 15 page pamphlet	ONE COPY for each church Free!	_____

(Payment enclosed) TOTAL

Name

Address

City State Zip Code

Send order sheet with payment in full to:

The Rev. Paul E. Spiecker
452 Lafayette Avenue
Hawthorne, New Jersey 07506

Please make check payable to The Rev. Paul E. Spiecker, not the Commission on
Archives and History.

PULPIT BIBLE ONE BRAND NEW R.S.V. PULPIT BIBLE, complete Text Red Imitation Leather
in original box and paper wrapping. NEVER OPENED. 10" X 13" NO NAME IMPRINTED
ON THIS BIBLE - Cokesbury price \$70---for sale at \$35 plus postage or delivery.